

too late. This is simply irresponsible and damaging for those veterans who need these devices.

The Democrat agenda and this bill clearly include more taxes on Americans. The new taxes may be hidden but they are there. It is disingenuous. It is costly. This bill is expected to cost \$2.5 trillion on top of our already exploding debt. This bill is exactly what America does not need, and that is why Americans oppose it. It is common sense.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I rise to express my concerns about the Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Appropriations Act which is currently pending before the Senate. I was one of the seven Members of the Senate to vote against our version of this bill in October and I regret that I must vote against it once again. This time it was also held to a time when they thought Christmas would force fast action even on things that don't belong on a defense bill that should have been last October.

Congress has gotten into a bad habit of using our military funding bills as "must pass" legislation to get approval for other unrelated items. This year, the items are a number of extensions on legislation we were not able to finish as part of our regular business. The majority leadership wouldn't allow us to work together to get our job done so some are using a troop bill as cover. There are 13 sections attached to this bill that have nothing to do with our troops.

Now folks might wonder why Congress attaches unrelated items to military bills. Because doing what is right is a difficult stand to take and say no to military funding. The majority party is hoping that enough Senators will want to avoid voting against military funding and be willing to take the bad or the unknown with the good.

We are also now considering this defense bill not as a conference report that has gone through our regular process, but as a message between the House and Senate in order to avoid normal Senate procedures. The Senate has our rules and procedures for a reason. Our procedures are designed to allow Senators the opportunity to fully consider what legislation does and does not do. When Senate leaders avoid Senate rules and procedures, they dodge their responsibility to those who elected us.

I want to make very clear my strong support for the members of our Armed Forces and the vital work they are doing around the world every day. My State of Wyoming currently has about 900 soldiers deployed with our National Guard in Iraq and Kuwait our largest deployment ever.

I have the greatest admiration for all of them for their commitment to preserving our freedoms and maintaining our national security. They are all true heroes and they are the ones who are doing the heavy lifting and making great sacrifices in our country's name so that we might continue to be the land of the free and the home of the brave.

I am extremely disappointed that our troops must continue to pay the price for political posturing in a must-pass military funding bill loaded with unrelated and unquestioned provisions. Do our troops at home and deployed need the funding for the programs in this legislation? Do they deserve better from their elected congressional representation than being used as cover to enact unrelated legislation? The answer is yes.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I support the Department of Defense Appropriations Act for 2010.

This legislation provides the funding our men and women in uniform need to continue their efforts on behalf of our Nation. The \$128.3 billion included in this bill to fund operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is an important statement of support for the troops who are serving so bravely so far from home.

This bill also includes important measures that will help Michigan and other states weather the economic strain they now face.

Most important of these are provisions that will extend unemployment benefits and Federal assistance to offset the costs of health insurance for those who have lost their jobs. Existing unemployment benefits are expected to expire at the end of this year. I am pleased that under this bill, benefits will be extended to February 28, 2010, making many Michiganders and other Americans eligible for expanded benefits that provide more support, and for a longer duration. This is crucial assistance to families coping with the devastation of job loss.

In addition, the bill extends from nine to 15 months the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's assistance to workers who have involuntarily lost their jobs to pay for health coverage under COBRA. That assistance pays up to 65 percent of workers' COBRA premiums. Under current law, workers who lose their jobs after December 31 would not be eligible for this assistance, but the bill extends that deadline to February 28, 2010, ensuring that thousands of Americans will not have to deal with the loss of health care at the same time they face the loss of a job.

The legislation also would continue improvements in Small Business Administration loan programs, improvements enacted in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to make SBA loan guarantee programs more attractive to borrowers and lenders. Through February 28, 2010, the SBA would be able to continue offering guarantees up to 90 percent of loan amounts, and to continue waiving or reducing loan fees. Access to capital is among the biggest factors keeping companies from hiring, and continuing these measures is an important step toward boosting employment.

This bill also includes provisions to ensure that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP, has the funding required to meet increas-

ing demand, and to provide States with funding to process the growing number of applications for the program more quickly. And it will maintain 2009 poverty guidelines for Health and Human Services programs through February 28, 2010, preventing a loss of eligibility for many recipients of means-tested programs, including Medicaid, SNAP and child nutrition programs. These provisions will prevent the opening of holes in our social safety net just as Americans are most in need of support.

These provisions are much needed to help blunt the impact of recession on America's workers as we work toward a brighter economic future.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONGRATULATING THE NORTHWEST MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM

Mr. President, I commend and congratulate the Northwest Missouri State University Football team on their most recent victory in the NCAA Division II Championship this past weekend. Their journey to this game and their performance in it testifies to their dedication and perseverance.

The Bearcat football team has seen much success and disappointment over the past four seasons. Having reached the championship contest the previous 4 years only to fall short in the title game, the Bearcats, led by Coach Mel Tjeerdsma, would not be denied victory in this fifth straight championship contest.

By a score of 30-23 over the Grand Valley State Lakers, a formidable opponent, the Northwest Missouri State Bearcats wiped away their heartbreak from the past with their win.

The victory comes on the 10th anniversary of their last national championship, and once again brings great pride to their football program, students, faculty, their home city of Maryville, and the entire State of Missouri. The NWMSU Bearcats have now won three national championships since 1998, proving to be one of the best programs in Division II football.

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate Coach Tjeerdsma and his entire coaching staff, current students, faculty and alumni, and most all the football players who never gave up—especially the senior class who have gone through the challenges of the past 4 years. They proved that with hard work and dedication any goal is attainable.

Congratulations to the Northwest Missouri State University Bearcats on